DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 423 738 HE 031 474

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TITLE	Lessons from a Three-Year Project To Advance Interprofessional Education in Nine Universities. Occasional Paper No. 1.
INSTITUTION	Fordham Univ., New York, NY. National Center for Schools and Communities.
SPONS AGENCY	DeWitt Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund, Pleasantville, NY.
PUB DATE	1997-08-00
NOTE	16p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Center for Schools and Communities, Fordham University, 33 West 60th Street, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10023; Tel: 212-636-6699; Fax: 212-636-6033; e-mail: ncsc@mary.fordham.edu (free).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrators; College Curriculum; College Faculty; *College School Cooperation; *Cooperative Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; Graduate Students; Graduate Study; Higher Education; Internship Programs; *Partnerships in Education; School Community Relationship; *Social Work; *Teacher Education; Teachers; Universities

ABSTRACT

In a 3-year program, the National Center for Schools and Communities enabled nine universities (Boston College, Massachusetts; California State University, Long Beach; Clark Atlanta University, Georgia; Eastern Washington University; Howard University, District of Columbia; University of Houston, Texas; University of Utah; Washington University, Missouri; and Wayne State University, Michigan) to develop curricula and internship experiences to prepare social work and education students for collaboration in public schools. Most programs included didactic course work and a joint internship for small cohorts of 4 to 40 students. Interview and focus group data suggest that while university faculty felt the personal costs of collaboration outweighed the personal benefits, public school teachers and graduate students generally felt the exchanges were worthwhile. Two major lessons were learned: (1) establishing goals that can be operationalized in common requires sustained, focused dialogue whereby parties experience each other's special capabilities and come to understand the limits for action imposed by each other's organizational context; and (2) interorganizational collaboration is the responsibility of leaders and cannot be delegated. The paper also addresses whether comprehensive approaches will enable more children to succeed in school, whether public school principals should assume primary responsibility for service integration, and whether university preparation for work in collaboration is a good way to advance collaboration in later practice. (MDM)

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Occasional Paper #1

Eileen Foley, Ph.D.

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August, 1997

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Foreword

As a National Center working with children and families in poverty, we plan to pause occasionally to record our perspectives on our work. This first "occasional paper" reports the lessons we learned as a result of our efforts to effect changes within nine universities across the country. The Center supported collaborative projects in which education and social work faculty and students worked together to provide services to public school students and their families. This three-year effort resulted in some successes and presented some difficulties, as described by the Center's evaluator, Dr. Eileen Foley. More information on this project, which was supported by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, may be obtained by contacting the Center.

Current programs at the National Center focus on community schools, public school facilities that, typically, are open to students, siblings, parents and other community members, with a full range of educational, recreational, career readiness, counseling, and emergency services, 15 hours a day, six days a week, 12 months a year. A simple idea, the positive consequences for children's education and their lives can be profound.

The Center currently is initiating community schools in Boston, Salt Lake City, and Long Beach, California in partnership with The Children's Aid Society. A second major project is the evaluation of after-school programs in New York City. The Center also facilitates discussion of community school issues through conferences, newsletters, and electronic communications.

Reflections on these projects will appear in future "occasional papers."

Carolyn Denham, Ph.D.

Director

National Center for Schools and Communities

Lessons from a Three-Year Project to Advance Interprofessional Education in Nine Universities is made possible by a grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. The mission of the Fund is to foster fundamental improvement in the quality of educational and career development opportunities for all school-age youth, and to increase access to these improved services for young people in low-income communities. This report will appear as a chapter in a forthcoming book by Greenwood Press.

Acknowledgements

Lessons from a Three-Year Project to Advance Interprofessional Education in Nine Universities is a result of the work of many individuals. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following site evaluators who collected local data and prepared site reports. **Boston College:** Dr. Anne Marie Delaney; **California State University, Long Beach:** Dr. Nancy Rainville-Oliver, Dr. John Oliver, Dr. Julie O'Donnell, Dr. Bonnie Kellogg, Dr. Sylvia Maxson; **Clark Atlanta University:** Dr. E.B. Attah, Dr. John Blackshear; **Eastern Washington University:** Dr. Bill Horner, Mr. Fred Schrumpf; **Howard University:** Dr. Jacqueline Smith, Dr. Ruby Gourdine; **University of Houston:** Dr. Mary Lewis, Dr. Phyllis Gingiss , Dr. Paul Raffoul, Dr. Dennis Smith; **University of Utah:** Dr. Dory Walker; **Washington University:** Dr. Kathi Beyer, Dr. Marilyn Cohn, Dr. Robert Pierce, Dr. David Cronin, Dr. James H. Williams, Ms. Deborah Paulsrud; **Wayne State University:** Dr. Phyllis Ivory Vroom, Ms. Jacqueline Dannis, MA, Roxanne Tarzone, MSW, Anne W. Blake, M.S.L.S., Dr. JoAnne Holbert, Dr. Sharon Elliott.

Several individuals at Fordham University were involved in preparing and reviewing the evaluation summary on which this document is based. Gillian Eddins, MSW, then a student in the Graduate School of Social Service, read site reports, coded data, and summarized data in detailed charts. Dr. Eugene Shinn, Professor, Graduate School of Social Service, made detailed comments and suggested thoughtful revisions of early drafts. Dean Mary Ann Quaranta of the Graduate School of Social Service and Dean Regis Bernhardt of the Graduate School of Education carefully reviewed the evaluation summary.

I am grateful to Dr. Carolyn Denham, Director of the National Center for her support, detailed review of this document, and insightful editing. And I am grateful to Trisch Arbib, Director of Communications and Project Coordinator, for reviewing and proofreading this document over many drafts and for bringing the text to final form. Thanks also to Marilyn Rose who, together with Dr. Denham and Ms. Arbib, prepared the report for presentation.

The National Center's evaluation advisory board helped to frame the direction for the overall evaluation. Sincere thanks to the Center's advisory board for their very valuable contribution. The advisory board includes the following individuals: Dr. David Fanshel, Columbia University; Dr. Carl Grant, University of Wisconsin; Dr. George Madaus, Boston College; Dr. Barbara Morrison, University of South Carolina; Dr. Robert Stake, University of Illinois. The author, of course, remains responsible for the accuracy of facts presented and the interpretation of those facts.

Lessons from a Three-Year Project to Advance Interprofessional Education in Nine Universities

Groups and individuals, parents and professionals who care for children are increasingly called upon to collaborate. Less integrated approaches to developing youth and addressing the problems associated with poverty are not believed to work as well as collaborative approaches.

Making this point in *Within Our Reach*, a synthesis of research on successful interventions designed to address problems of the disadvantaged, Lisbeth B.Schorr (1988) writes:

> The programs that work best for children and families in high-risk environments typically offer comprehensive and intensive services .... they are able to respond flexibly to a wide variety of needs .... Interventions that are successful ... all seem to have staffs with the time and skill to establish relationships based on mutual respect and trust (p. xxii).

From 1993 through 1996, with support from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the National Center for Schools and Communities enabled nine universities[1] to develop curricula and internship experiences to prepare social work and education students for collaboration in public schools. The idea underlying the initiative was that collaboration between social work and education graduate students would promote collaboration in later service and that service collaboration would improve outcomes for children.

This paper presents lessons learned in the course of the Center's three-year, nine-university effort to foster interprofessional collaboration. It attempts to explain why collaboration, which is so highly regarded in policy circles, is so little practiced.

The paper is arranged in two parts. The first part chronicles the Center's effort to define and understand collaboration in order to determine if it was occurring in member-university projects. The second section addresses policy questions that are key to advancing collaboration in light of the Center's three-year experience.

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[1] Universities in the Center's network include Boston College; California State University, Long Beach; Clark Atlanta University; Eastern Washington University; Howard University; The University of Houston; The University of Utah; Washington University; and Wayne State University.

What is collaboration?

At the threshold of its evaluation effort, the National Center faced a vexing problem: establishing a standard by which to label a process collaborative. How exactly were university faculty to relate to one another as they developed curricula and instructed students? How exactly were graduate students to relate to one another and to others in the public school in their practicum?

The work of Smith and Hutchinson (1992) provided initial guidance to the evaluation around these questions. Smith and Hutchinson define collaboration as an interactive process through which individuals and organizations with diverse expertise and resources join forces to plan, generate, and execute designs for solutions to mutually identified goals and problems. Smith and Hutchinson's work directed Center evaluators to ask if emerging university interprofessional training programs had agreed upon goals and if participants planned and acted in common.

At the end of two years of effort, we found that faculty in most universities had sufficiently planned and acted in common to produce a joint training program for graduate students. Most programs included didactic course work for sizable numbers of students and a joint internship for a small cohort of four to forty students.

Sites varied in their mode of presenting didactic instruction. Some added new courses. Some modified existing courses. Some did not offer stand-alone courses. They simply developed curricula for integrative seminars that guided the joint internship experience.

Sites varied with regard to the content of joint internship experiences. Some created case management committees in which supervised social work and education graduate students jointly reviewed individual client cases, parceled out service tasks, and coordinated and reviewed case work. Some created collaborative schoolwide activities such as health fairs and job fairs.

What varied most was the extent of involvement by university faculty. At some universities interprofessional teams of faculty worked intensively to prepare and deliver joint instruction. At other universities faculty from one discipline anchored the program with modest participation by faculty from the other discipline. Sometimes the responsibilities and tasks were passed to non-faculty members.

The great variation among sites with regard to faculty involvement led evaluators to ask how much connectedness among faculty was actually necessary to support a program of interprofessional training. If more connectedness were needed than evaluators found in several of the sites, what was getting in the way of joint planning and action by faculty members?

Data from focus groups indicated that the kind of interprofessional preparation that satisfied graduate students and faculty alike involved significant interprofessional faculty interaction. Students and faculty felt cheated or at least disappointed when interprofessional courses failed to engage the full participation of faculty and students from at least the two professions that were the focus of the intervention: social work and education.

The most intensive demands for collaboration were made on faculty leading joint internship experiences. Faculty were called on to meet regularly, sometimes weekly, to plan and manage joint service activities, to provide training and supervision to graduate students, and to orient and maintain contact with public school staff participating in the initiative. The time demands were costly and the interpersonal demands stressful. Professional paradigms and individual personalities were not easily meshed.

Sherif's (1966) analysis of intergroup conflict and cooperation offered some perspective on the difficulty many faculty had coping with the demands of the project. Individuals and groups work together, Sherif said, when they cannot obtain valued goals independently.

Sherif's notion of mutual benefit as a precondition for collaboration is echoed in exchange theory. Exchange theorists maintain that trades take place when the persons

involved perceive the benefits to outweigh the costs (Bazzozi, 1979; Lovelock & Weinberg, 1984).

The data suggested that faculty viewed the personal costs of collaboration to outweigh the personal benefits. Many pointed out that the meetings required to orchestrate joint training of graduate students as well as the effort to get people to attend those meetings gobbled up their most valued resource, time, without returning much in the way of valued course content. Generally speaking, it was simply easier to structure curricula and to teach on one's own than it was to do these things with others.

Teachers, graduate students, and staff within the public schools, on the other hand, generally felt that the exchanges in which they were engaged were worthwhile. The time they spent talking and thinking together made their work with children more manageable and productive.

The premise of the intervention, that university training in collaboration would lead to collaboration in practice, failed to take account of the many obstacles to collaborative university-training. The evaluation data suggested that the transactional costs of interprofessional field training were too high for faculty members. All things being equal, success in "training" endeavors, no matter how cutting edge, would not generate great rewards.

Equipped with this understanding, evaluators turned again to the data. We wanted to identify any benefits that faculty members found that might fuel their continued involvement in interprofessional training. We also wanted to identify ways of reducing costs.

We found three core benefits. First, many faculty members valued the opportunity to talk seriously and deeply about shared professional concerns with public school staff and those outside their discipline: such conversations sparked ideas, furnished real life examples for instruction and research, and grounded scholarship. Another benefit that university participants found, particularly deans, was the opportunity to prepare new professionals to be

better related to those outside their discipline in service of children. A third benefit was the opportunity to help children in need.

For senior faculty members and administrators, those with more flexible schedules and more secure positions, the opportunities to serve, to lead, and to learn were often adequately balanced with the costs of collaboration to fuel consistent, if not vigorous, involvement in the program. For junior faculty, pursued by innumerable professional obligations, the demands of participation in a collaboration were often out of balance with the rewards of participation.

The issue for the project in its third year was well-defined: What might be done to adjust the balance of costs and benefits to make interprofessional collaboration more rewarding to larger numbers of faculty members?

The Boston College intervention showed how interprofessional conversation led by senior faculty members and deans could leverage increased joint action by faculty. At Boston College, faculty from education, social work, law, business, and the liberal arts established regular luncheon discussions focused on the needs of children. These "brown bag lunches" allowed faculty to begin to organize the intellectual space between their professions. Formal presentations were made by outside experts and by Boston College faculty. Participants came to understand each other's strengths and weaknesses. Interprofessional curricula were developed. Books and articles were written on collaboration and in collaboration. Faculty involvement in the Boston community grew.

The Boston College experience helped to clarify two dimensions of collaboration that had not been fully appreciated at the outset of the initiative. The first is that establishing goals that can be operationalized in common requires sustained, focused dialogue in which parties experience each other's special capabilities and come to understand the limits for action imposed by each other's organizational contexts. As a consequence of such a process, agreements of mutual benefit can be negotiated. Without the opportunity for such dialogue, opportunities to work in collaboration are not, in fact, real opportunities, but forced, stressful,

and awkward obligations. Planning periods (and planning grants), we learned, are very important precursors to joint action.

The second lesson exemplified through the Boston College experience is that interorganizational collaboration is the responsibility of leaders, a responsibility that cannot be delegated. Consider this example. Social work faculty teach on Mondays and Wednesdays. Education faculty teach on Tuesdays and Thursdays. How can joint planning sessions, let alone joint instruction of graduate students, be arranged? When institutional leaders remain at the bargaining table and work through these bothersome details, difficulties get resolved expeditiously. When institutional leaders delegate the problem solving to project directors, those project directors are forced to interact individually and repeatedly with implementers and decision makers, and they are often defeated by the resistance they meet.

The first job of directors of collaborative projects is to get key decision makers, implementers, and people with authority and legitimacy in the community around one table. The second job is to keep them there. This is very difficult.

In order to achieve persistent involvement by leaders, those leaders must understand their centrality to the collaborative process. They must have some "excess capacity," enough to allow them to engage in the process. And, finally, they must be willing to use that excess capacity for the collaboration. Under these circumstances, i.e., when leaders are actively engaged, the time demands and stress on implementers are more manageable and the costs and benefits of participation balanced in favor of success.

What does the truth about collaboration mean for policy?

Policy makers ask many questions about interprofessional collaboration: Will comprehensive approaches enable more children to succeed? Are public school personnel appropriate leaders of service integration efforts? Is university preparation in collaboration a good way to advance collaboration? Reflections on these issues, grounded in the Center's experience, follow.

Will comprehensive approaches enable more children to succeed?

Collaboration requires a great deal of hard work. There is ambiguity and tension, sometimes open conflict, as group members explore each others' capacities and professional paradigms. The time it takes to understand what a potential partner has to offer and to arrive at goals and objectives that are common and implementable is time taken by key organizational leaders away from vital organizational activities, like direct service in a public school and research in a university.

In successful collaborations, in the long run, the time spent seeking common ground enriches practitioners beyond cost. Professionals frame activities that collectively have a closer proximity to children's real needs. Individuals within the collective emerge with greater wisdom and purpose, with a stronger support network, and with a greater sense of hopefulness, which works, one expects, to improve outcomes for children and families.

Not all efforts to collaborate, however, bear such fruit, even in the long run. Efforts in which leaders provide only rhetorical support, in which participants do not have what each other needs, or in which participants do not get to know each other well enough to structure mutually beneficial agreements yield bad agreements. Living out bad agreements undermines staff morale, staff performance, and, one expects, client outcomes. The importance of joint planning and sustained problem solving by leaders in collaborations cannot be overstated.

Should public school principals assume primary responsibility for service integration efforts?

Who can lead service integration efforts? The importance of academic learning to child development engenders serious consideration of the possibility that public school principals can assume primary responsibility for service integration efforts. After all, teachers and principals are on the frontline of efforts to develop children and youth, and most welcome help, when it is respectful, reliable, and competent.

The literature compels even casual readers, however, to acknowledge that school principals do best when they focus on instruction (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds and Fredericksen, 1978). Given this obligation, it is unlikely that principals can assume primary responsibility for the consuming business of integrating youth services. It is equally unlikely, however, given the importance of academic learning and the ubiquity of school houses, that integrative service arrangements can be optimally successful without engaging public school professionals as leadership team participants.

Like school professionals, university faculty have a role to play in service integration. They bring capacities for planning and evaluating programs, for facilitating dialogue and training staff, for orchestrating the service of graduate students, and for conducting research. University faculty members are, however, also unlikely longterm leaders of service integration efforts. Faculty members have obligations to knowledge development that would make serious and sustained excursions into program management the exception rather than the rule.

Heads of strong, well-funded, multi-service, youth-serving organizations are among the most likely leaders of service integration efforts. Leaders of these organizations tend to focus on the whole child rather than on an aspect of the child, such as cognitive development, and this is a strength. Often these leaders have experience blending resources from multiple funding streams, and this is another strength.

Whoever emerges in a particular site with primary responsibility for the integration of youth services will benefit from the help of those who have already travelled that road.

Facilitators can enable participants to construct and nurture a clear and common vision, to resolve differences constructively, and to approach programming, governance, funding, and public relations in a way that capitalizes on the strengths of all members of the collaborative.

Is university preparation for work in collaboration a good way to advance collaboration in later practice?

The data show that graduate students value preparation for interprofessional collaboration when that preparation includes extensive experience in a real world context. The skills of collaboration including communicating effectively, resolving conflict constructively, and negotiating agreements that maximize joint benefits can be best grasped in action.

The "field" is not, however, set up to provide graduate students with supervised opportunities for interprofessional collaboration. There are few places where graduate students can engage in interprofessional dialogues or be rewarded for using collaborative approaches to problem solving. The "field" is not itself collaborative.

Informing graduate students of the routines of work in collaboration is one part of interprofessional preparation. The other part is providing opportunities for students to develop genuine competence. University leaders should involve themselves in strategic collaborations with field settings to create environments that model integrated service delivery and that provide opportunities for training in collaboration.

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